Thinking Ahead

Trends affecting public education in the future

Canadian Council on Social Development
August 1999

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Introduction

THERE IS NO QUESTION that the context and environment in which public education operates is in a period of significant change. Public expectations are shifting as labour markets restructure and the role and scope of governments are challenged. These changes give rise to many questions about

- the central purpose of public education;
- the function and content of a comprehensive curriculum;
- the role of teachers and the status of the teaching profession;
- changing institutional frameworks and governance structures;
- the role of the general public in this process of change.

This discussion paper identifies some of the key challenges that will influence the course of public education over the next 20 years. The first section of the paper outlines the current trends and their implications for public education. The next section summarizes the current debate about education and the possible directions it could take as a result of societal trends. In the conclusion, potential areas for future investigation are presented.

Social and Economic Trends

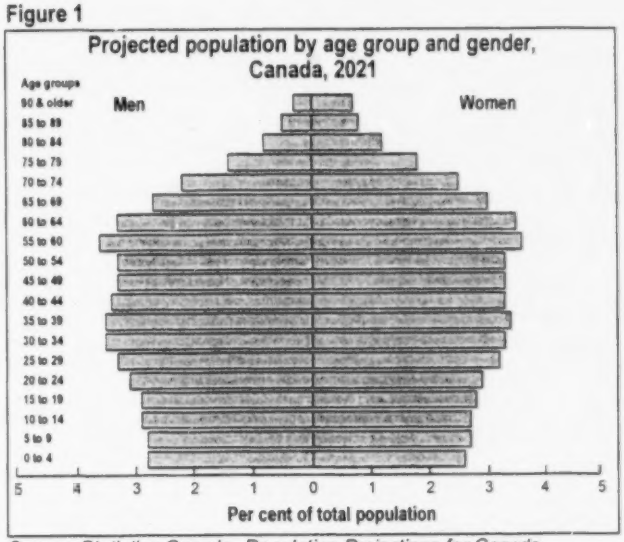
Changes in the Age Composition of the Population

Due to changing population demographics in Canada, there will be a significant shift in the proportion of school-aged children over the next 20 years: in 1996, school-aged children and youth (five to 19 years of age) made up 21% of the Canadian population; by 2020, it is estimated that this age group will comprise only 16% of the overall population.[1]

By 2020, the largest population group will be baby boomers – by then, aged 55 to 65 – followed by the Echo generation who will be in their 30s. The baby boomers will begin reaching the retirement age of 65 by 2010. Over the subsequent two decades, as successive cohorts of this group join the ranks of those aged 65 and older, the size of this group will expand greatly.

Changes in the age structure of the population will affect every category of public spending to some degree. Three areas of public spending are particularly sensitive to demographic shifts: income security, health care and education.

Figure 1



Source: Statistics Canada. *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories: 1993-2016.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1994.

And while not all the elderly will depend on publicly funded pensions and services, by the sheer weight of their numbers, they will put pressure on governments to spend money on income security and health care programs.[2]

This is not to suggest that self-interest exclusively determines spending priorities. However, previous patterns demonstrate that in the competition for public spending, population numbers and political clout do make a difference. Evidence also suggests that the influence of the baby boomers, now and in the future, will be based not only on their numbers, but also on their control of many positions of power throughout society.

Implications

➨ Seniors may attach a lower priority to using public resources for education than they did when they were younger and raising children.

➨ Spending on education as a percentage of GDP has been falling in recent years. The declining proportion of the school-aged population will ensure that this trend continues.[3]

➨ The importance accorded to education will decline as the baby-boom generation shifts its focus to other social issues, such as health care and income security.[4]

Ethno-racial Mix

Over the next 20 years, an increasing proportion of children in schools will be immigrants and members of visible minority groups. Nearly 200,000 immigrants enter Canada annually, almost 45,000 of whom are school-aged children who enrol in Canadian elementary and secondary schools. While the overall number of immigrant children as a proportion of the total population is small, these children exert a considerable impact on schools, particularly in large urban centres.

It is important to note that over the last several years there has been a shift in the countries of origin of immigrants to Canada, from Northern European countries to Southeast Asian and African countries. As a result, approximately two-thirds of all school-aged immigrant children arrive speaking neither official language, which places special demands on the school systems.

After acclimatizing to Canada, immigrant children tend to do quite well: their educational outcomes are comparable to those of the rest of the population. The exception is among Afro-Canadian children who experience lower rates of integration into the educational system and have lower levels of educational attainment.[5]

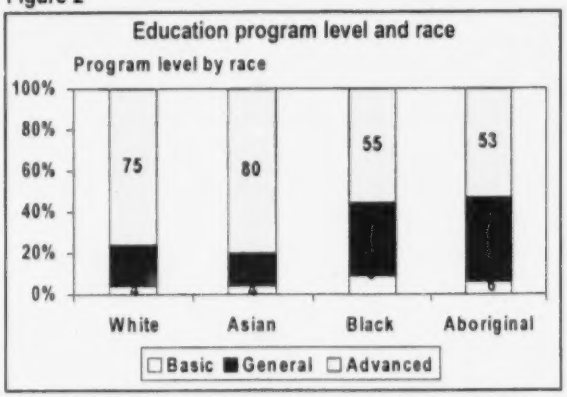
Aboriginal children also experience lower levels of educational attainment compared to the rest of the child and youth population in Canada, although this trend is improving. In 1996-97, for example, 71% of Aboriginal students remained in school up to Grade 12, compared to only 37% in 1987-88.

The post-secondary enrolment rate for the Registered Indian population aged 17 to 34 increased from 6% in 1993-94 to 6.9% in 1995-96. Over the same period, the rate for non-Aboriginal Canadians aged 17 to 34 increased from 10.1 to 11%.[6] Because the proportion of children within the Aboriginal population is significantly higher than the proportion of children among the Canadian population as a whole, the educational situation of this group is critical.

Implications

➨ The growing numbers of school-aged children from immigrant and visible minority groups will continue to put pressures on the educational system for such programs as English as a Second Language (ESL) and for course materials and curricula that reflect the diversity of their beliefs and backgrounds.

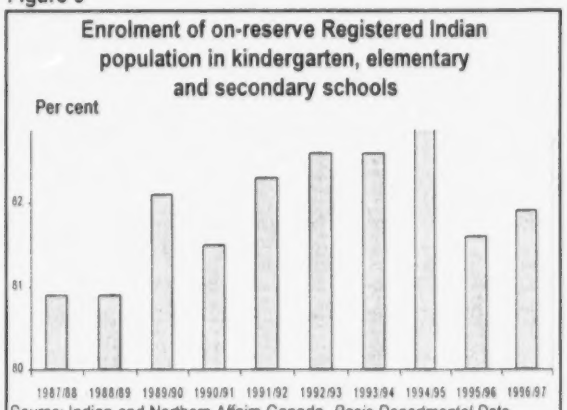
Figure 2



Source: Toronto Board of Education. *The 1991 Every Secondary Student Survey, Part II: Detailed Profiles of Toronto's Secondary School Students.* Toronto: Research Services, 1993.

➨ The growing diversity of the Canadian population is likely to increase pressures for specialized or ethno-specific institutions that are operated according to the values and beliefs of particular groups. These pressures will further complicate the existing tensions between advocates of integration and those who want to validate different cultural realities through the educational system.

Figure 3



Source: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Basic Departmental Data 1997.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1998.

- The percentage of Registered Indian school-aged children on-reserve enrolled in kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools increased marginally, from 80.9% in 1987/88 to 82% in 1996/97.

- The total number of on-reserve children enrolled in kindergarten, elementary and secondary schools increased by 33% between 1987/88 and 1996/97, from 84,271 to 112,060.

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➨ Lower educational results among particular groups perpetuate their social exclusion and lower economic outcomes, raising serious questions about how the educational system can be changed to serve the needs of these students.

Family Structure

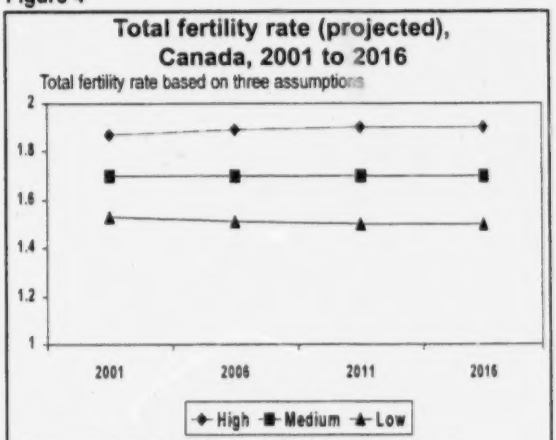
Children live in very different families today compared to families in the past. At the height of the baby boom in 1960, the fertility rate was 3.9 children per woman; by 1996, it had declined to an almost historic low of 1.6. As a result, families in Canada are getting smaller. The average family size in 1971 was 3.7, but by 1998, it had dropped to 3.0.[7] The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) found that 46% of children under age 12 lived with only one brother or sister. As a result, children are learning more of their socialization skills from other children in the neighbourhood or in the school and less from their siblings, as was the case in the past. (A notable variation from this pattern is among the Aboriginal population, where the birth rate is double that of the Canadian rate: 27 births per 1,000 compared to 13 per 1,000 in the general population.)

Divorce rates have risen as dramatically in Canada as they have in all industrialized countries, creating major changes for children in the family. As well, more children are being born outside of marriage. The most striking example is in Quebec, where 43% of children are born to common-law couples and 51% to married couples. Thus, more children than ever before are likely to experience family changes, and often at a younger age.[8]

One result of these new patterns of family formation and dissolution is that a greater percentage of children in the school system in 2020 will come from lone-parent families and from families that are experiencing transitions. According to the latest Census, nearly 1.8 million children lived in lone-parent families in 1996.

Research has shown that children growing up in lone-parent families have a greater likelihood of being disadvantaged throughout their lives – largely as a result of greater economic and emotional stresses – compared to children in two-parent families. In terms of their health, behaviour, academic achievements and relationships, children in lone-parent families have a greater likelihood of negative outcomes than do children in the general population.[9]

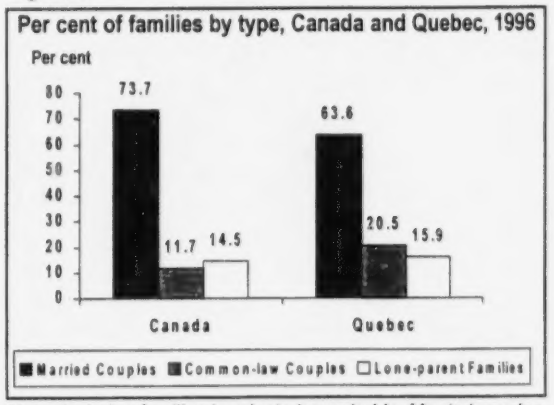
Figure 4



Source: Statistics Canada. *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories: 1993-2016.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1994.

Low scenario: decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) combined with a high variant for the mean age of fertility which will increase from 27.9 years of age in 1993 to 28.5 years of age by 2016.
Medium scenario: TFR will remain constant at 1.7 births per woman. The mean age of fertility is assumed to change slightly, from 27.9 years of age in 1993 to 28 years of age by 2016.
High scenario: TFR will rise from 1.7 births per woman in 1993 to 1.9 births per woman by 2016. Assumes a decreasing mean age of fertility from 27.9 years of age in 1993 to 27.5 years of age by 2016.

Figure 5



Note: Includes families in private households. Married couples and common-law couples are considered families whether or not they have never-married children living with them.
Source: Statistics Canada. *Annual Demographic Statistics, 1998.* Ottawa, Industry Canada, 1999.

Regardless of the family structure, most parents will continue to work outside of the home, juggling the dual responsibilities of paid employment and family care. These demands have become acute in a climate of economic uncertainty, government cutbacks, and the aging of the population. The resulting time crunch will continue to be a reality for most families in 2020, affecting the well-being of individuals within the family and the family as a whole.

Implications

➨ Growing time pressures on families, especially among lone-parent families, will have ramifications for the educational system. As parents have less time available at home, they will look to the schools to play a greater role in supervising students and providing them with guidance and discipline.

➨ Job pressures on parents will continue to highlight the need for early childhood education and the establishment of before- and after-school programs within the public education system. Evidence suggests that regardless of socio-economic status, children who participate in quality child care perform significantly better than children who do not participate, and they are better prepared for elementary and secondary education.[10] This is especially true for children in low-income families.

➨ The time crunch will also continue to limit parents' abilities to be involved in their children's education. This is particularly true in cases where the time limitations are exacerbated by other barriers, such as a lack of income or an inability to speak the official language.

Labour Market and the Economy

The Canadian economy continues to move ahead and generate significant profits, but without generating new jobs at a commensurate rate. In fact, in many instances and among particular sectors and firms, increased productivity has been accompanied by downsizing and the shedding of labour. The last decade has seen a growing polarization in the quality of jobs in Canada, the distribution of earned income, and the hours of work. Full-time jobs have been disappearing, and low-paying, non-standard jobs are increasing. At the same time, the creation of some "good jobs" has resulted in an increase in average family income for those at the high end of the earnings scale.[11]

The last 20 years has also seen a polarization of working hours, with greater proportions of employees regularly working either more or fewer hours each week, and a declining share working a standard 35 to 40 hours per week. A generation ago, two-thirds of the employed labour force worked full-time, putting in 35 to 40 hours a week,[12] but only half the workers today have such jobs. One in five jobs is now part-time, while one in five employees worked overtime in any given week in 1997, putting in, on average, almost nine additional hours per week – the equivalent of more than one extra day of work each week. Highly paid employees are the most likely to work overtime hours.

Canadians have stabilized their family incomes mainly by increasing the number of hours of paid work put in by members of the family unit. But we may be approaching a "saturation point" where there simply aren't any more hours available to be worked, so this household strategy to offset market forces may have run its course. As a result, the incomes of two-earner families are falling behind: real (or inflation-adjusted) average family market incomes were lower in 1997 than in 1981, with 60% of families with children earning less than they had in 1981.[13] Economic insecurity is starkly illustrated in the stubbornly high numbers of children living in poverty.[14]

Another growing labour market phenomenon that has an impact on children is the rise in self-employment. Over the last decade, the number of self-employed workers has increased by 42.5% – seven times the rate of increase in the number of employees. Self-employed individuals accounted for 18% of total employment in 1998, compared to just 14% in 1989. Self-employment offers little security or benefits, and it is often low-paying work.[15]

Developments in the labour market and the economy over the next 20 years are difficult to predict, but it is reasonable to expect an acceleration of the current trends as has been the case over the last decade. The knowledge-based global economy will no doubt continue to develop and Canada is likely to be part of this trend. However, there is little evidence that the benefits from these economic trends "trickle down" to all children and their families. In fact, new evidence suggests that the differential between those who are benefiting from the knowledge-based economy and those who are not may be greater than was previously thought.[16]

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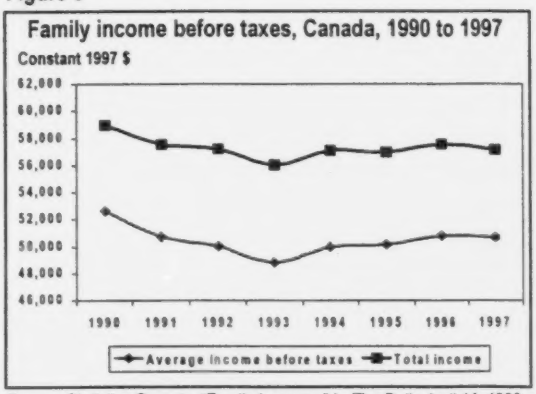
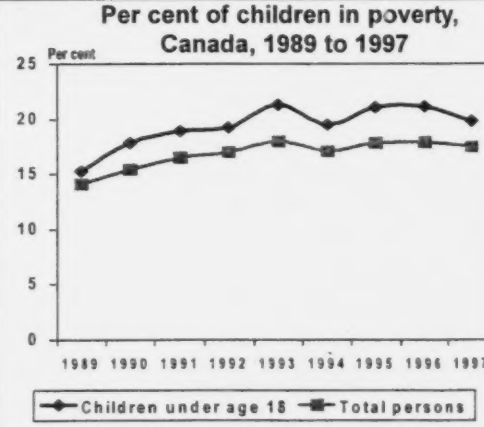
Figure 6



Source: Statistics Canada. "Family Incomes," in *The Daily*, April 14, 1999.

As more young people complete high school and pursue post-secondary studies, their rates of unemployment and underemployment are falling, but only slowly. The gap in earnings and working conditions between post-secondary graduates and young people with a high school education or less is widening, indicating that completing school is more critical than ever before.

Figure 7



Source: Statistics Canada. "Family Incomes," in *The Daily*, April 14, 1999.

- There were 37% more children in poverty in 1997 than in 1989, yet the total number of children in the population increased by only 6% during this time.

- Children in lone-parent families headed by women were almost five times more likely to be in a low income situation than were children in two-parent families.

- While young families comprised only 4% of all families in 1997, they represented 11.0% of low-income families.

But for many young people during the 1990s, higher levels of education did not translate into well-paid employment. The real annual earnings of men aged 17 to 24, for instance, fell 33% between 1981 and 1993, and they fell 23% for women over the same period. In 1997, half of the employed youth in Canada were in part-time or temporary jobs, despite growing levels of education. (This pattern is not unique to Canada. Other countries were similarly unable to absorb the educated elites they prepared in the 1990s.) A progressive economy in the 21st century will need citizens with higher levels of education, but there are many other "supply-side" factors that are necessary if individuals are to realize the benefits that education has to offer.[17]

As employment becomes more elusive, the transition from school to work has become more difficult, more circuitous and prolonged. This transition into employment is now a major focus in many educational reform initiatives. And while co-operative education has grown in post-secondary institutions, work experience or work/study programs are becoming more widespread in high schools. However, the results of these programs are not encouraging.[18] If one of the core roles of education is to provide knowledge and skills that can be applied in the labour market, then we need to understand more about how the skills taught in school are put to use – or not – in the labour market.

Additional training after formal education is varied. Overall, training rates are declining, but within that trend, people with post-secondary education receive more training than those with lower education levels, thus further reinforcing the polarization of opportunities and income.

Implications

➨ The growing gap in earnings experienced by those with different levels of education will increase the demands for school/work transition programs, improved career counselling, and school/business partnerships. However, if such programs continue to fail to deliver on the promise of better employment prospects, the search for programs may diminish.

➨ Educational outcomes vary according to socio-economic backgrounds, among other factors. This growing underclass will mean that those students will continue to have poorer educational results, and their lower educational achievements will, in turn, decrease their labour force opportunities.

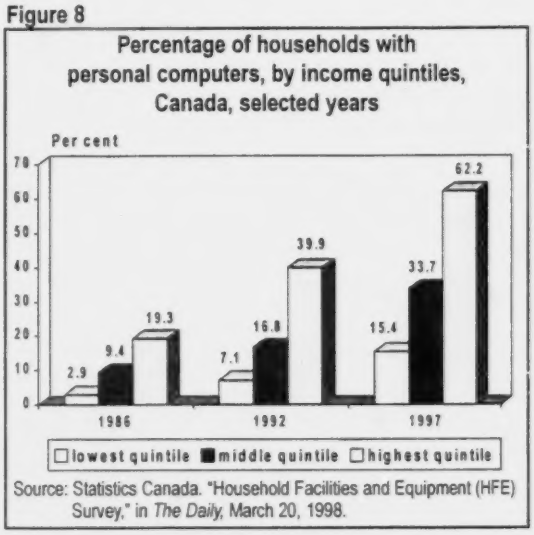
Information and Communications Technology

As computers have moved into classrooms and workplaces, technology has exploded as an educational issue. Like reading or writing skills, the ability to use a computer is becoming a prerequisite for student success, as well as a life skill. The technological revolution is moving at such a rapid pace that any review of "current" activities is certain to be obsolete by the time it is written, therefore its development over the next 20 years can only be imagined. Its impact, however, is already being felt, and there are some critical questions still to be answered.

Computers have reached most schools in Canada, and we were one of the first countries to link our student body to the information highway. In 1995, Newfoundland became the first province with full Internet access. By 1997, virtually all schools across Canada had Internet access through the SchoolNet electronic network. Despite overall reductions in public education budgets, many provinces have plans to expand the role of technology in the curriculum, and a number have specific targets for classroom computer acquisitions.[19] Industry Canada's "Computers in the Schools" program has moved thousands of computers into the classrooms. By 1997, the program had placed more than 20,000 computers and 40,000 pieces of software in schools and libraries.[20]

Computer technology is spreading among Canadian homes as well. By 1997, personal computers were a fixture in half of single-family households with children under the age of 18, up from 45% in 1996. Of these households, about one-third, or 651,000 households, had access to the Internet at home, compared with just over one-fifth in 1996, when data were first collected on home Internet use. Canadian schoolchildren aged 12 to 17 who have access to computers and the Internet in their homes spend at least two hours per week doing homework on their computers – one-third of the total time they spend doing homework.[21]

Figure 8



Source: Statistics Canada. "Household Facilities and Equipment (HFE) Survey," in *The Daily*, March 20, 1998.

But there are still significant barriers for many families. Households with the highest incomes were four times as likely to have computers as households with the lowest incomes. For the quintile of households with the highest incomes, 62% had a computer in 1997, compared with 15% for the quintile of households with the lowest incomes. In 1986, only 19% of households in the highest quintile had a computer and just 3% of households in the lowest quintile.[22]

There is also a gender gap in computer usage. Research indicates that young girls aged 4 to 7 spend more time on computers than boys of that age, but by the time they are in their teens, girls' usage declines while boys' increases. This is also reflected in the under-representation of women in the technology field of the labour market. According to Computer Canada's newsletter, only 10% of technologists and technicians are women. In Canadian universities, only 24% of computer science undergraduates are women, compared to 60% in university overall. Women's enrolment in computer science programs has fallen from 28% to 24% over the last four years. This has occurred despite continued warnings that Canada will have a shortage of computer specialists by the year 2000.

Using the new technologies, students and teachers have access to a much wider range of information. But access to technology raises many questions about its role in the educational process and the ramifications of its acquisition and use for other learning resources and in curriculum development.

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Implications

➨ Do new technologies have the potential to fundamentally democratize knowledge and information, or will they further polarize, reinforcing the gulf between those who are part of the transformation and those who remain on the outside?

➨ Technology raises important questions about the role of teachers in the future. How should the educational system prepare for and maintain a technologically literate workforce? How should the system ensure the teacher's capacity to move from the role of instructor to that of a guide?

➨ Should technology be viewed as a subject within the core curriculum – as one of the skills that every student must acquire before leaving school – or, as a key resource or mode of acquiring information and learning?

➨ The concept of technology as a key resource or vehicle for acquiring knowledge raises more questions about the equality of access to learning. If access to the new technologies is unevenly distributed and if these new technologies will figure even more prominently in learning in the future, then the differential between the more educated and less educated will become greater.

➨ The prospect of independent learning with the use of technology raises the possibility that schools may become one of many study locations. If schools become resource centres that can be accessed for specific activities but move away from being a core physical presence, what are the consequences in terms of their communities and their relationships with those for whom they are responsible? How will society's custodial expectations of schools change?

➨ Along with fostering more independence and autonomous behaviour, interactive technologies may also exert a movement in the opposite direction, to create better and stronger communities of interest. How can technologies be used to foster links among students within and beyond the walls of individual schools?

Governance and Structures

Over the last decade, the roles played by governments in the name of the collective or public good have been shrinking as governments have reduced the scope of what they do and the resources they invest. They are withdrawing from various fields in favour of the private sector, other levels of government, the voluntary sector, or sometimes all three. Certain fields, such as health care, prisons, even road ownership are now being viewed as appropriate territory for the private sector on a for-profit basis.

In education, public funding and public provision have tended to be synonymous, although this is not necessarily so. In fact, funding and provision are separate in some jurisdictions. As well, hierarchical structures are being dismantled in favour of more modular structures governed by shared values and missions. Across many sectors of the economy, structures are being streamlined in order to improve efficiency and to shorten the distance between the decision-makers and those carrying out the work.

A key component of these changes is the move towards governing or being guided more by the outcomes and results that are to be achieved, and less by prescribed rules. There has also been a move towards more individualized approaches in service delivery, rather than using a "cookie-cutter" or "one-size-fits-all" approach. From consumer products such as refrigerators and cars, to services such as financial planning or travel, the trend is away from off-the-rack standardization and towards customization.

These trends in governance have implications for public education.

Implications

➨ Shifts in the breadth and depth of public responsibility are evident in the debate about the boundaries of public responsibility for education. Of the four components of education – early childhood, elementary, secondary and post-secondary – tensions are emerging about the "bookends," namely early childhood education and post-secondary education. Efforts are being made to bring early childhood education into the public envelope, while at the same time, pressures to allow post-secondary education to move outside of that envelope are growing.

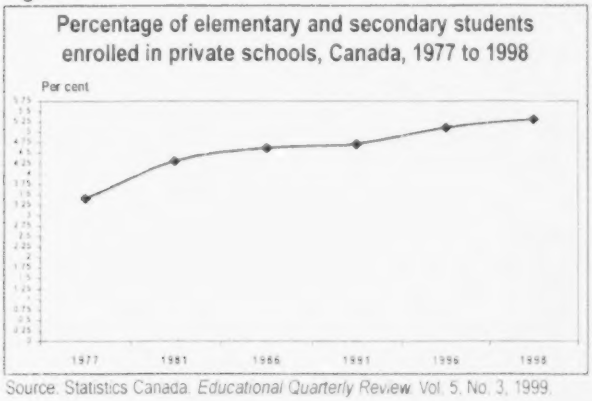
➨ The structures of public education are changing significantly, with greater control and authority being assumed at the provincial level, a generally reduced role for schools boards,[23] and the establishment of parent-based school councils in all provinces. Where local taxation powers have been removed, there has been a further loss of

discretionary power for school boards. While school councils may counter this trend and may represent a move towards more local decision-making, initial evidence suggests that they are usually effective only in upper middle-class schools.

➨ Trends towards more choices in schools will continue, as more choices are offered and demanded. These choices will include both private alternatives and increased specialization and autonomy within publicly financed schools. Enrolment in independent schools is growing, and a number of Canadian cities are developing systems of "magnet" schools that specialize in a particular discipline or approach and draw students from a wide geographic area.

➨ A number of initiatives at different levels of the educational system are attempting to set learning outcomes and to track achievements through performance indicators and testing. Some of these initiatives have been at the pan-Canadian level (such as the Pan Canadian Education Indicators Program), while many others have been established within provinces.

Figure 9

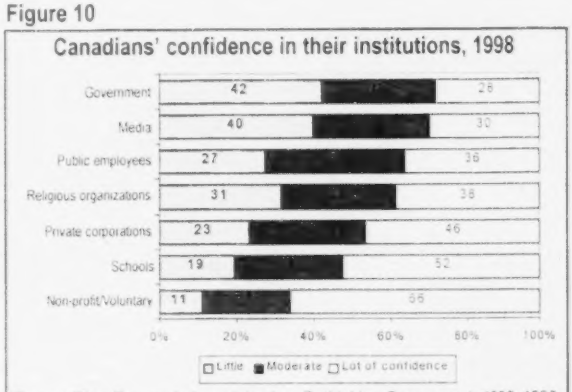


Source: Statistics Canada. *Educational Quarterly Review*. Vol. 5, No. 3, 1999.

Changing Values and Expectations

Canadians continue to value self-reliance, compassion, investments in the future, and fiscal responsibility.[24] There are, however, definite shifts in public attitudes towards other individuals and institutions. Canadians of all ages are showing less deference to authority and greater attachment to individualism than was previously the case.[25] As seen in Figure 10, large centralized institutions do not enjoy the same level of trust as they have in the past. The prevalence of mass communications and the mushrooming of communications technologies have reinforced this trend by making information available to everyone. And with growing flexibility in work arrangements and in family forms, individual identity is playing a larger role in how people see themselves. Institutions are being seen more as building blocks, rather than as defining structures of identification. People are more likely to think of themselves first as individuals, rather than as students or employees or family members. They are also more likely to see themselves in a number of roles simultaneously.[26]

Figure 10



Source: Ekos Research Associates Inc. *Rethinking Government, 1998*, 1998.

- "Confidence" was interpreted as "trust and confidence" in an institution's abilities.
- The low confidence levels assigned by the public to government could be a reflection of the government's performance or its ability to follow through on promises and ideas.

There continues to be a strong and widely shared belief among Canadians that education is important. This belief has remained unshaken even when the expected benefits of higher education have not materialized in the labour market. However, Canadians have only a moderate level of confidence in the job being done by the public education system as a whole.[27] This higher value attached to individualism has reinforced demands for educational reform generally and customized approaches specifically.

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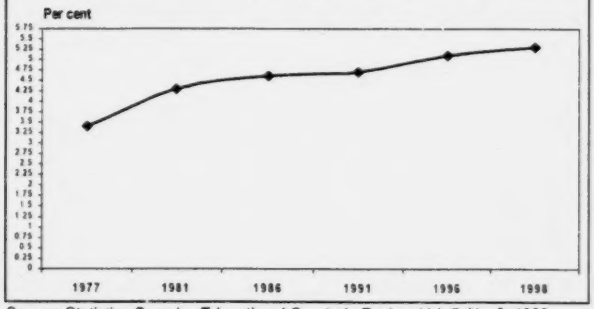
discretionary power for school boards. While school councils may counter this trend and may represent a move towards more local decision-making, initial evidence suggests that they are usually effective only in upper middle-class schools.

➨ Trends towards more choices in schools will continue, as more choices are offered and demanded. These choices will include both private alternatives and increased specialization and autonomy within publicly financed schools. Enrolment in independent schools is growing, and a number of Canadian cities are developing systems of "magnet" schools that specialize in a particular discipline or approach and draw students from a wide geographic area.

➨ A number of initiatives at different levels of the educational system are attempting to set learning outcomes and to track achievements through performance indicators and testing. Some of these initiatives have been at the pan-Canadian level (such as the Pan Canadian Education Indicators Program), while many others have been established within provinces.

Figure 9

Percentage of elementary and secondary students enrolled in private schools, Canada, 1977 to 1998



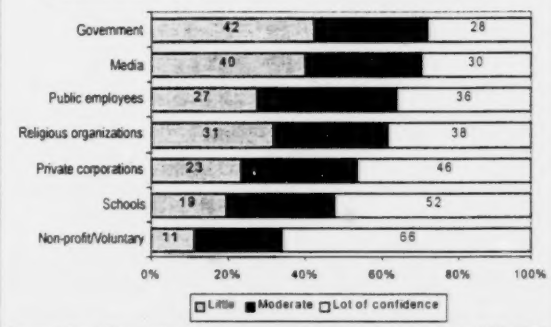
Source: Statistics Canada. *Educational Quarterly Review.* Vol. 5, No. 3, 1999.

Changing Values and Expectations

Canadians continue to value self-reliance, compassion, investments in the future, and fiscal responsibility.[24] There are, however, definite shifts in public attitudes towards other individuals and institutions. Canadians of all ages are showing less deference to authority and greater attachment to individualism than was previously the case.[25] As seen in Figure 10, large centralized institutions do not enjoy the same level of trust as they have in the past. The prevalence of mass communications and the mushrooming of communications technologies have reinforced this trend by making information available to everyone. And with growing flexibility in work arrangements and in family forms, individual identity is playing a larger role in how people see themselves. Institutions are being seen more as building blocks, rather than as defining structures of identification. People are more likely to think of themselves first as individuals, rather than as students or employees or family members. They are also more likely to see themselves in a number of roles simultaneously.[26]

Figure 10

Canadians' confidence in their institutions, 1998



Source: Ekos Research Associates Inc. *Rethinking Government, 1998*, 1998.

- "Confidence" was interpreted as "trust and confidence" in an institution's abilities.
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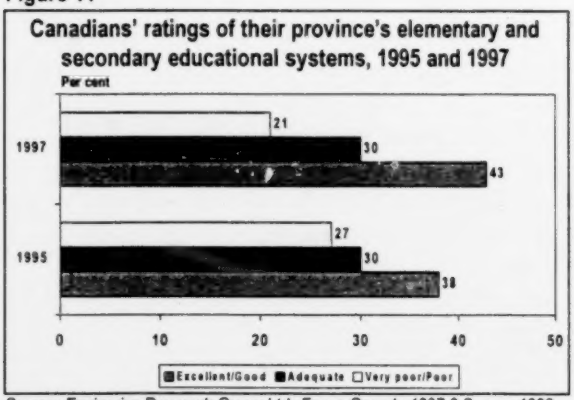
Figure 11



Source: Environics Research Group Ltd. *Focus Canada 1997-2 Survey, 1999.*

Implications

➨ Declining public confidence in large institutions and declining respect for authority are accelerating trends to streamline hierarchies and remove layers of administration. This is also contributing to changing reactions by those who use the system. We are witnessing a growing – albeit, limited – interest in greater involvement in public education, by everyone from groups operating in their own particular schools, to those looking for opportunities to debate the roles and central components of education.

➨ Greater confidence in and reliance on democratically available information has opened the door to many more forms of independent learning. This, in turn, raises questions about how these new forms of learning can be fostered, about the role of teachers in independent learning, and questions about the role of schools as learning and community focal points.

➨ The shift from mass production of consumer goods to customized models is a response to public expectations that products be tailored to their needs and that people are prepared to search for such customized products. The same trend can be seen with respect to education, with the growth in educational alternatives, both public and private. Even within the public education system, schools are increasingly engaged in marketing to promote their advantages and the niche they serve in order to attract more students. Reluctance to accept the existing and homogeneous public programs is evident in the increased demands for educational choices.

Influences on Education over the Next 20 Years

THESE TRENDS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS reveal the range and degree of pressures that are likely to be exerted on public education in the future. In order to examine some of these pressures in more detail, it is useful to review different perspectives on the core purpose of public education.

According to some people, education should be considered as a public good, an institution involved in
- transmitting core knowledge in order to produce good citizens
- providing socialization and supervision
- equalizing opportunities
- instilling fundamental skills to equip citizens for lifelong learning.

For others, public education primarily serves as a means of
- optimizing human development for individual growth and fulfillment
- creating a productive and effective economy.

With the increasing polarization of income and work, movement towards a two-tiered system of education can be expected to continue unless there are deliberate interventions to change this course. Public education is no longer viewed consistently as an equalizing and universal institution in Canada. Trends towards specialization and increased choices have been reinforced by shifts in values that embrace a consumer-oriented approach to education by the better-off elements of society. Specialization will be further pushed by the desire for education that is specific to particular ideologies, religions or ethnicity, or for education that can maximize high achievement in particular fields, such as in the arts or athletics, or can overcome particular learning difficulties.

Much of this specialization will be offered within private institutions, but it is also likely to be accepted within the public education system as well. While access to private education is based on a family's income, there are problems with specialization in the public system, not the least of which is the public education system's capacity to carry out its role as an equalizing and socializing institution that contributes to social cohesion.

The nature of the relationship between schools and communities will probably change. Traditionally, schools have been one of the major sources of socialization and they have been expected to serve as the custodians of community values. Communities are often judged on the basis of their schools, which can serve as enticements (or the opposite) for prospective residents. The capacity of schools to continue to play this role may be threatened by several developments. New technologies may reduce the role of schools as the primary port of entry to learning. And specialization – both outside and within the public system – may weaken the bonds between schools and their geographic communities, although new communities of interest may replace this to some degree.

At the same time, children will have a greater need for supervisors and security, as the parental presence continues to decline. Schools will also be expected to play a greater role in acculturation. Further, the focus on human development and the building of a civil society may increase the role of schools in the creation of health and well-being in the community. But will schools continue to play a strong role within the whole community, or will they become the primary ports only for those disadvantaged and with no private options? If so, it would increase the likelihood of creating "have" and "have-not" schools, with predictable results in terms of the schools' appeal, resources and outcomes.

The issues of equity and access will continue to underlie much of the debate. The view of education as predominantly an equalizing institution has been replaced lately by the view of education as a key to economic success. In both cases, the key to success will be achieving good outcomes for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. The challenge of doing so becomes greater if high-achieving students – and resources – take flight to privileged enclaves.

Another pressure point will involve teachers. Twenty years from now, teachers will have a distinct demographic profile that will differ from that of their students in many ways. Research suggests that teachers will continue to be mainly white, middle-aged women,[28] although looming teacher shortages may result in broader recruitment that could mitigate this trend. Teachers will be operating in a system that is heavily influenced and shaped by new technologies, and their roles may be increasingly as guides assisting students to access and assess multiple sources of information. Many of their activities may not involve face-to-face interactions. These developments and other considerations may well affect the status and appeal of teaching as a profession.

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Trends in governance and the extent of public versus individual responsibility will continue to influence decisions about public education, often in ways that are more indirect and implicit, rather than explicit. Should our collective responsibility extend from early childhood through to post-secondary education? And should public resources be used to support alternative forms of education that exclude certain students based on income, aptitude, or some other barrier?

Streamlining of the organizational structures of education will probably continue. In a number of jurisdictions, this process has already led to reductions in the authority of school boards, and in one province, they have been eliminated entirely. Authority has been appropriated by provincial ministries, leaving local school councils with limited decision-making power over their own schools.

Debates will continue regarding the definition of common or core elements of curricula, which elements are considered to be valuable and important, and which elements are best left to local school councils or boards so that they can respond appropriately to the needs of their particular populations.

These trends are not immutable: public will and collective purpose can shape and alter many of these directions. Consequently, it is critical to create a broad-based dialogue about these issues. There is a need to question the appropriate content of core learning, the role of education, and which types of education should be publicly supported. But there are few ways to generate public consensus. It is not clear at which level this debate should occur, who should be a part of it, or how it can be undertaken. Governments everywhere are caught up with citizen engagement, but education remains a topic about which citizens have not yet been widely engaged. There are a few examples of consensus being built around education, but they tend to be from rural rather than urban communities and often involve communities that have experienced multiple problems. However, much can be learned from their experiences. The clear challenge is to develop ways to engage the public in discussions about education.

Issues for Investigation, Dialogue or Intervention

1. **Concepts of core curricula:** What should be the components of a core curriculum in the future, given a diverse population and the growth of technology?

2. **The teachers of the future:** As teachers face a more specialized and differentiated education system, the changing environment will require them to be guides as much as instructors. How will teachers acquire the skills for this role and how will they apply them to diverse populations? As staffing shortages develop over the next 20 years, how will the profession be renewed? How will teachers be recruited, developed and retrained? What will be the status of the profession?

3. **The dialogue about education:** How can we facilitate a dialogue about the purposes of public education? How can these purposes be translated into policy, curricula and institutional and governance structures for education? Which parts of this debate should occur at a broad level and which aspects at a local level?

4. **The growing differentiation of education:** Are school systems becoming two-tiered? What are the consequences of this? Can the trend be resisted, or influenced, and how?

5. **The parameters of public education:** Should the public education system be extended to include early childhood education? Should private options be considered for post-secondary education? Which forms of specialized education should be publicly supported?

6. **Accountability in public education:** What do Canadians expect of their schools? Who is accountable? To whom and for what? How can this be implemented?

7. **Equitable delivery of education:** What can be done to focus on the groups with consistently lower educational outcomes? Can there be pilot approaches or interventions in communities to enhance the learning opportunities and outcomes of disadvantaged children?

8. **Lifelong learning:** What skills are required to assist Canadians to adapt to economic and social changes? How can these skills be used in life after graduation? How should they be taught? What role does the public education system have in this?

9. **Schools in communities:** The needs and demands of Canadians are increasingly complex. How can schools best respond to those needs? How can schools respond to the needs of communities?

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Epilogue

THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED following discussions with an interdisciplinary group of thoughtful individuals from a variety of fields. We invited them to help identify the major social and economic trends over the next 20 years that will shape the environment in which public education operates. A draft paper was reviewed by these individuals and by others interested in these issues. Their comments were rich and insightful. Most strikingly, they presented a wide range of very different views about the central purpose of public education and the place that it holds in our society – both now and in the future.

Nearly everyone commented that the discussion paper described a series of trends and possible directions, but did not offer a vision of where education should go in the future. The importance of having a vision was expressed keenly by most commentators and was referred to by one person as "shaping the future, not just reacting to it." Another person felt that the paper conveyed the impression that "we are not able to shape our futures, that constructive policy changes or program responses are, at best, rearguard actions designed to mitigate undesirable change."

This paper did not set out to develop a vision, but hopefully it will contribute to developing one. As a starting point, we would like to share some of the visions suggested by our commentators. In many ways, they demonstrate the range of perspectives on education and the passion and centrality with which it is viewed.

Several commentators spoke about the importance of education as the one truly proactive public investment we make. It is not designed to address a problem, but rather to build the society we want for the future by investing in the creation of human and social capacity.

Some commentators referred to the critical role that schools play within the community. From this perspective, schools serve as a common acculturation agency in the building of a civil society. Others described the importance of building a common knowledge base for an educated citizenry. And some argued that public education should prepare future citizens better by providing a range of developmental options and an even playing field where all can develop to their full potential.

The range and depth of these visions reinforced one of the central findings of this paper – that we need to create a public dialogue and engagement on these issues, for education is an issue that touches everyone.

Endnotes

[1] Statistics Canada. *Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories: 1993-2016.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1998.

[2] The 1998 Report of the Auditor General found that "government spending on social security will accelerate" and that "population aging will intensify pressure on medicare." In 1996, all levels of government spent an estimated $52.6 billion on health care, or 6.4% of GDP. While most of the growth in health care spending since the 1970s has been due to higher spending per user, better services, and the higher cost of those services, the report noted that "even if future increases in per capita spending prove to be lower than in the past for every age group, medicare expenditures overall will rise as the population ages." The report estimated that spending on health care would rise to 9% of GDP by 2031 in the medium-cost case scenario.

[3] Statistics Canada. *Education in Canada 1997.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1998.

[4] According to results from the *Canada Health Monitor Survey,* Canadians under age 34 have a higher propensity to identify education as their preferred priority for government spending. But for Canadians over age 35, the priority shifts to health, and this focus on health becomes particularly strong for those over age 45. Approximately 34% of Canadians between 45 and 64 chose health as their preferred priority for government spending, compared to less than 17% who chose education as the priority.

[5] Toronto Board of Education, Research Services. *Schools in Toronto: 1991-1992.*

[6] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. *Basic Departmental Data 1997.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1998.

[7] Statistics Canada. *Annual Demographic Statistics 1998.* Ottawa: Industry Canada, 1999.

[8] According to the NLSCY, 20.5% of children experienced parental separation in their first 10 years of life. *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, 1994-95.*

[9] David P. Ross et al. *How do Lone-parent Children Differ from All Families?* Applied Research Bulletin, Winter 1998-7E. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada 1998.

[10] Cleveland, G. et al. *The Costs and Benefits of Good Child Care.* Toronto: Canadian Childcare Research Unit, 1998.

[11] Yalnizyan, Armine. *The Growing Gap.* Toronto: Centre for Social Justice, October 1998.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Canada's child poverty rate remains very high. Since 1989, the number of poor children has increased by 60% – to 564,000. In 1989, one child in seven was poor; by 1996, one in five was poor. The number of poor children in two-parent families has increased by 43%, while the number in lone-parent families has increased by 92%. In 1989, 8.7% of children lived in families with incomes of less than $20,000 per year (1996 constant $); by 1996, the rate had climbed to 13.1%, or 932,000 children in families with annual incomes of less than $20,000.

[15] Statistics Canada. "Labour Force Survey," in *The Daily, January 8, 1999.*

[16] Lowe, Graham. Personal interviews, 1999.

[17] Shapiro, Bernard. Personal interviews, 1999.

[18] Lowe, Graham et al. *1996 Alberta High School Graduate Survey: Report of the Research Findings.* Edmonton: Communications Branch, Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development, January 1998.

[19] For example, BC announced a five-year plan in 1995 to have one computer for every three secondary students and every six elementary students. By the year 2000, Alberta will have spent $85 million making computer equipment available to students and promoting the use of technology in the classroom. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Report on Education in Canada 1998.* (http://www.cmec.ca/reports/rec98).

[20] Canadian Education Association, *Educational Trends in Canada.* (http://www.acea.ca/trends.html)

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[21] Angus Reid Group Inc. *Internet study shows schoolchildren using computers for homework*. May 29, 1998 (http://www.angusreid.com).

[22] Statistics Canada. "Household facilities by income and other characteristics," in *The Daily*, March 20, 1998.

[23] As examples, New Brunswick has eliminated school boards. Ontario has removed significant authority from school boards and has mandated the establishment of school-level councils that are being given a larger role.

[24] Canadian Policy Research Networks. *The Society We Want – A public dialogue*. Discussion Leader's Kit, April 1997.

[25] Adams, Michael. *Sex in the Snow* Toronto: Viking Press, 1997.

[26] Ibid.

[27] A 1996 Ekos poll found that 53% were "very satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied" with the overall state of public education. When asked about elementary and secondary school education in their province, 43% described it as "good" or "excellent," 30% as "adequate," and 21% as "poor." The majority of people still had confidence in schools as institutions: 53% had "lots of confidence," while only 19% had "little confidence," and the remaining 28% had "moderate confidence."

[28] Wideen, Marvin et al. *Impact of immigration on education in British Columbia: An analysis of efforts to implement policies of Multiculturalism in schools*. Vancouver: Vancouver Centre of Excellence, Working Paper Series # 99-02, January 1999.

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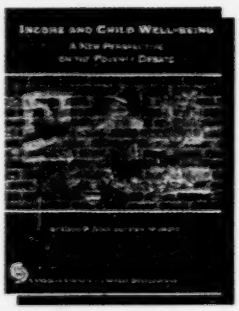

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Membership includes a subscription to *Perception*, CCSD's quarterly periodical. If you do not wish to receive *Perception*, check here ❒ and select one of the following options:

❒ Keep my subscription as a donation and send me a tax receipt for $20
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Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone (home): _____ Phone (work): _____

Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

Payment Options:

❒ Cheque enclosed ❒ Please bill me (organizations only)

❒ VISA ❒ MasterCard Expiry Date _____

Card No. _____

Signature _____

Kindly complete and return this memberhsip form with payment to:

CCSD Membership Services
441 MacLaren, 4th Floor, Ottawa ON K2P 2H3
Tel: (613) 236-8977; fax: (613) 236-2750
E-mail: membership@ccsd.ca Internet: www.ccsd.ca

Charitable registration no: 11928923 RR0001

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